BASERUNNING-PART 1

Presented at the North Penn Clinic on March 24th, 2012 by J.E.Smith

For a team to score a run, all a batter has to do is safely (and legally) advance to first base, second base, third base and home plate, in that order, before there are three outs.

It's simple!...or is it? For there are all sorts of trouble and hazards that await the base runner as he attempts to advance to each base.

PLAY #1: There is a runner on first base with two outs. The batter hits a ground ball to the shortstop. The infielder is unable to field the ball cleanly and struggles to get possession of the ball. He finally picks up the ball with his right hand and reaches to second base and touches the base with his empty glove on his left hand just before the runner from first reaches the base. What is the umpire's call?

RULING: OUT, for this is a FORCE OUT. And that ends the inning.

What exactly is a **FORCE OUT**? We all know what a FORCE OUT is. We have known since we were kids. But put it into words: What is a Force Out?

How's this? "A FORCE OUT is a play in which a runner legally loses his right to occupy a base by reason of the batter becoming a runner." (source: MLB Rule 2.0-A Force Play)

The Federation Rule is cited in Rule 8-4-2j. It reads "A runner is out when he fails to reach the next base before a fielder either tags the runner out or holds the ball while touching such base, after runner has been forced from the base he occupied because the batter became a runner (with ball in play) when other runners were on first base, or on first and second, or on first, second and third…"

The Federation Rules Book lists 11 ways a batter-runner can be called out [Rule 8-4-1a…k] and 18 ways a runner can be called out [Rule 8-4-2a…r].

That totals 29 ways to get a runner out, and it does not include the ways a batter can make an out without becoming a runner.
 [13 ways; Rules 7-3 and 7-4]

Let's look at a few examples of how a runner can be called out.

Play #2: With one out and a runner on first base, the batter hits a ground ball to the second baseman. He tosses the ball to the shortstop who touches second base for a force out. The shortstop throws the ball to the first baseman for a possible double play. The runner from first base did not slide.   What is the umpire's call?

Ruling: It depends. On a force play, the base runner is REQUIRED to slide in a direct line between the bases. But he may ALSO may also run himself out of the play or slide in a direction AWAY from the fielder to avoid making contact or altering the play of the fielder. [Rule 8-4-2b & f]

If the umpire judges that the runner is guilty of an illegal slide, he shall call TIME. The runner is to be called OUT because he was put out by the force play, but the umpire shall also call the batter-runner OUT for the base runner's illegal slide that jeopardized a double play. If other base runner(s) advanced during this play, they shall be returned to their base(s) at time of pitch (TOP).

<u>ILLEGAL SLIDES</u>:

The base runner must slide straight into the base with one leg & buttock on the ground…no leg higher than the fielder's knee.

The following actions are illegal:

- The runner slides toward the fielder (not in a straight line toward the base) either attempting or NOT attempting to make a throw…contact is not necessary.
- The runner's slide carries him through the base and he makes contact with the fielder, which alters his play.
- The runner performs a pop-up slide that alters the fielder's play.
- The runner slides with his spikes high into the fielder above his knee.
- The runner cannot execute a cross body block on the fielder…this is grounds for malicious contact and ejection.

In all these cases, call TIME, and rule the runner and the batter-runner OUT. All other base runners must return to their base at TOP.
[Rule 8-4-2b & f; and "Base Hits"-2012 edition, by Marty Ondrovic, page 26]

Play #3: With one out and runners on second and third base, the batter hits a ground ball in the hole between the third baseman and the shortstop. The ball gets past the third baseman and then strikes the runner advancing from second base. What is the umpire's call?

RULING: It depends. If the umpire judges that another infielder (in this case, the shortstop) could have made a play on the ball, he shall call TIME and rule the runner who was hit by the batted ball OUT. The batter is awarded first base. The runner that was on third must return to his base at TOP.

Play #3a: …and with the same situation, the batted ball gets past the third baseman, strikes the runner, and bounces into foul territory and then out of play. The umpire was certain that no other infielder had a play on the ball. What is the call?

RULING: It depends. If the umpire is convinced that the third baseman did have a play on the batted ball before it strikes the runner AND the runner did nothing INTENTIONAL to be struck by the batted ball, the ball remains LIVE unless it goes out of play. In this play, it did. Because the ball went out of play, the umpire shall signal TIME. He shall award batter and all base runners TWO base from TOP. [Rule 8-4-2k and Rule 8-3-3c]

OTHER ILLEGAL ACTS BY A RUNNER:

- The runner may not run more than three feet from his position and the base toward which he is moving in a play in which he is trying to avoid being tagged. [Rule8-4-2a]
- The runner does not legally attempt to AVOID a fielder in the immediate act of making a play on him. [Rule 8-4-2c]
- The runner dives over a fielder. [Rule 8-4-2d]
- EXCEPTION: Jumping, hurdling, and leaping are legal attempts to avoid a fielder as long as the fielder is LYING ON THE GROUND. [Rule 8-4-2b2]

RULING: In either of these situations, if the runner violates any of these rules, call the runner OUT. The ball remains LIVE unless interference is also called.

- The runner deliberately knocks the ball from the fielder's hand. [Rule8-4-2r] RULING: Call the runner OUT.
- The runner passes an unobstructed preceding runner before such runner is out.
[Rule 8-4-2m] RULING: Call the runner OUT.
- The runner intentionally interferes with a throw or thrown ball; or hinders a fielder on his initial attempt to field a batted ball…
[Rule 8-4-2g] RULING: Call TIME and call the runner OUT; possibly call two OUT if a double play would have been possible.

Play #4: With no one out and runners on first and second base, the batter hits a pop-up to the infield. The umpires announce INFIELD FLY, BATTER IS OUT. The ball descends right on second base, where the runner remains. Does the runner have to yield to the fielder who is attempting to catch the ball? What if the batted ball hits the runner first; is he OUT? What should be the umpire's call?

RULING: If a runner is touching his base when he is hit by an infield fly, he is not out, but the batter is OUT by the INFIELD FLY RULE, and the ball is DEAD. [Rule 8-4-2k1]

ON THE OTHER HAND, the runner may win a prize because the defense screwed up. In umpire language, we call these BASE AWARDS.

There is a very nice table on page 49 of our Federation Rules Book that lists ALL base awards. And they are listed in Rule 8-3. I am not going to go over each and every one of these, buts let's talk about a few of them:

- When a fielder catches a fly ball and then leaves the playing field (with both feet); we call the batter OUT. The ball is now DEAD and we award all base runners ONE BASE from TOP.
- The pitcher commits a BALK, we call TIME (because in Fed. Rules, a balk is an immediate DEAD BALL) and award all base runners ONE BASE from TOP.
- A pickoff throw by the pitcher from the pitcher's plate goes out of play. The ball is DEAD and we award all base runners ONE BASE from TOP.
- On a play where the runner is forced because the batter is awarded first base. (Example: batter is hit by pitch; or how about the base umpire is hit by a batted ball; etc.)
- Catcher's obstruction occurred and we enforce the penalty...

Play #5 (Case Book Play #8.1.1 Situation N): With one out, and runners on second and third base; the catcher obstructs the batter, who hits a ground ball to the second baseman. The runner on second was attempting to steal third base on this play, even though third base was occupied by another runner. The batter is thrown out at first base. How many outs are there now, and where do you put the runners?

RULING: Rule 8-1-1e...During this play, we have "catcher's obstruction". The coach or captain of the team at bat, after being informed by the umpire-in-chief of the obstruction, shall indicate whether or not he elects to decline the obstruction penalty and accept the resulting play. Such election shall be made before the next pitch (legal or illegal), before the award of intentional base on balls, or before infielders leave the diamond. Obstruction of the batter is ignored if the batter-runner reaches first and all other runners advance at least one base.

Further, Rule 8-1-1e1...Any runner attempting to advance (i.e., steal or squeeze) on a catcher's obstruction of the batter shall be awarded the base he is attempting. If a runner is not attempting to advance on the catcher's obstruction, he shall not be entitled to the next base, if not forced to advance because of the batter being awarded first base. If obstruction is enforced, all other runners on the play will return to base occupied at time of the pitch. The batter is awarded first base, if he did not reach base.

To complete the rule, Rule 8-1-1e2...If obstruction is not enforced, all other runners advance at their own risk.

So in this play, the batter did not reach first base safely. The coach has the option of taking the result of the play or the penalty. If he takes the penalty, the batter is awarded first base. And since the runner that was on second was attempting to steal third base on the play, HE IS AWARDED THIRD BASE. And the runner who was on third base is forced to advance to home plate...and the run scores. NO OUTS are recorded on this play because of C.O..
Catcher's Obstruction is a DELAYED DEAD BALL situation.
[Rule 5-1-2b]

OBSTRUCTION:

There are other ways the defense can be guilty of obstruction.

The Rules Book defines **Obstruction** in Rule 2-22 on page 20.

> **Article 1**...Obstruction is the act (intentional or unintentional, as well as physical or verbal) by a fielder, any member of the defensive team or its team personnel that hinders a runner or changes the pattern of play; or when a catcher or fielder hinders a batter.
>   When obstruction occurs, the ball becomes dead at the end of playing action (In other words: DELAYED DEAD BALL) and the umpire has the authority to determine which base or bases shall be awarded the runners according to the rule violated.
> **Article 2**...A fake tag is an act by a defensive player without the ball that simulates a tag. A fake tag is considered obstruction.
> **Article 3**...The fielder without possession of the ball denies access to the base the runner is attempting to achieve.

Obstruction on a base runner:
a.   In all cases of Obstruction (FEDERATION RULES), the situation is always a DELAYED DEAD BALL. Always show the signal, and remove it after the obstructed runner achieves the base he would have gained if the obstruction did not occur. If an out occurs, call the OUT. Remember, the ball is alive until all play ceases. Then call TIME and apply the base award(s), which may reverse the out that was called.
 [Rule 5-1-2b and Rule 5-1-3]

b.   When a runner is obstructed while advancing or returning to a base, the umpire shall award the obstructed runner and each other runner affected by the obstruction the bases they would have reached, in his opinion, had there been no obstruction.

c. The obstructed runner is awarded a minimum of one base <u>beyond</u> his position on base when the obstruction occurred.

d. If any preceding runner is forced to advance by the awarding of a base to an obstructed runner, the umpire shall award this preceding runner(s) the necessary base or bases.

e. Runner(s) will be awarded appropriate base(s) per umpire judgment.

f. ***If the obstructed runner achieves the base he was attempting to acquire, then the obstruction is ignored.*** [Rule 8-3-2]

A more serious cousin of Obstruction is <u>Malicious Contact</u>:

a. A coach, player, substitute, attendant or other bench personnel shall not initiate malicious contact on offense or defense.

b. What is malicious contact:
This definition cannot be found in the Rule Book, but it can be implied as any act of illegal bodily contact that appears hostile or violent. This is not in print anywhere, but when a player raises his hands, arms, feet, or legs, or lowers his shoulder upon contact with an opposing player; you will have to judge whether you just witnessed malicious contact.

Play #6: With one out, and bases loaded;

The batter singles sharply to left field. The runner from third scores easily. The runner from second rounds third and fails to slide at home plate as the catcher is receiving the throw from the left fielder. He collides with the catcher as the tag is being made.

The catcher springs up and throws to second base in attempt to retire the batter-runner. The batter-runner fails to slide and knocks the ball free. The runner who was on first base ends up at third on this play.

When all play ceases, the umpires see that the second baseman is lying on the ground injured. The umpires call TIME.

What are the rulings that the umpires should apply to this play?
How many runs score on this play?
How many outs are there?
Where do the umpires place the runners, or is the inning over?
Are there any ejections?

RULING: The runner who was attempting to score is not required to slide, but he cannot legally go into home plate standing and collide with the catcher. **This is malicious contact**. Perhaps you would not judge malicious contact if there was a clear attempt by the runner to go around the catcher, who in this case, may be guilty of obstruction.

Malicious contact is not defined in the Rule Book. Let us understand that any act of illegal bodily contact that appears hostile or violent shall be considered as malicious.

If the umpire judges that malicious contact has occurred, he shall call the runner out, and call TIME, as **malicious contact results in a Dead Ball**. [Rule 5-1-1m]

The penalty for malicious contact is an automatic **ejection** of the player from the game.

"***Malicious contact always supersedes obstruction***.
Runner(s) will be awarded appropriate bases per umpire's judgment."
[Rule 8-4-2e1]
So even if the catcher is guilty of obstruction, the Rules Book tells us that malicious contact takes precedence.

Now, we also have an action at second base. Do we have malicious contact there also? If it is judged that we do, what should happen?
    The malicious contact at home plate must result in a Dead Ball. Runners cannot advance beyond the base that they last legally touched once the ball is dead. But we have another collision at second base that occurred after malicious contact occurred at home plate, which is a dead ball interval. If we judge that we also had malicious contact at second base, we cannot ignore it. That player also is to be ejected from the game. Since the ball was already dead when that collision occurred, the offensive team can have a replacement player return to the last base legally touched when the first malicious contact occurred. That would be first base. All play technically ended at the moment of the first malicious contact.

    So to answer the questions asked, assuming we had judged malicious contact at home plate and second base:

The runner from third scored before the runner from second is called out for malicious contact at home plate. The ball is dead, and the player guilty of the malicious contact shall be ejected. One run scores on this play.

The runner at second base is also guilty of malicious contact. He is ejected. That runner had legally last touched first base, therefore his replacement is put on first.

The runner that started at first base will remain at third base, <u>provided he was already there when the first malicious contact (at home plate) occurred</u>. Otherwise, he will be sent back to second base.

In summary: There are two outs, and two players are ejected from the game. Two runners are on base and one run has already scored during the inning.

    c.   When malicious contact occurs, it is an immediate Dead Ball. Call TIME and eject the offender from the game. [Rule 5-1-1m]

    d.   (repeat) ***Malicious contact always supersedes obstruction.*** [Rule 8-4-2e]
(malicious contact = Dead Ball;
      obstruction = DELAYED Dead Ball)

    e.   If the <u>defense</u> commits the malicious contact, call the play dead by calling TIME. The umpire shall rule safe or out on the play. The player shall be ejected, and award the runner(s) the appropriate base(s) he believes they would have obtained if the malicious contact had not occurred. [Rule 3-3-1n]

    f.   If the <u>offense</u> commits the malicious contact, call the play dead by calling TIME. If the offensive player had already scored before he committed the malicious contact, the run does count. Otherwise, call the offender OUT, and eject him from the game. All other runners must be returned to the base they last legally touched at the time of the infraction.

    g.   If you eject someone from the game, remember to file a report of the unsportsmanlike act on PIAA's website within 24 hours of the incident.

<u>LODGED BALL</u>:

What is a **Lodged Ball**?
How's this?...the ball impacts something-stops abruptly, and does not fall out or roll immediately.
["Base Hits"-2012 edition, by Marty Ondrovic, page 14]

It can happen on a pitched ball, as it can become lodged in the catcher's gear, umpire's equipment, or wedged in the backstop.

It can happen on a thrown ball, by becoming lodged in a player's or umpire's uniform, or wedged in a fence.

Or it can become lodged as the ball is batted, and becomes lodged in a player's equipment or a fence.

Play #7: The batter hits a single to right. Batter-runner is caught in a rundown between first and second. During the rundown, the ball becomes lodged in batter-runner's shirt while he is a), headed toward first or b) headed toward second.

RULING: The ball is DEAD immediately in both cases, (a) batter-runner is placed at first; in (b) batter-runner is awarded second. In either case, all other runners move up, IF FORCED to advance because of the award to the batter-runner.
(Case Book 8.3.3 situation B)

OR, to confuse you further, how about this play?...

Play #8: On a sharply hit ground ball that is snagged by the pitcher, the player's initial attempts to withdraw the ball from the glove and throw the ball to the first baseman are not successful. In an attempt to retire the batter-runner, the pitcher tosses his glove WITH the lodged ball to the first baseman.

RULING: The plate umpire will declare the ball DEAD and award the batter-runner SECOND base. When the pitcher tossed his fielding glove to the first baseman to put out the batter-runner, it became apparent that the ball was lodged and the ball becomes DEAD, and the award is made. (Case Book 5.1.1 situation R)

So, what are the base awards for a lodged ball?

ONE BASE if a PITCH or any throw BY THE PITCHER FROM THE PITCHING POSITION ON HIS PLATE…lodges in a fence or backstop… [Rule 8-3-3d]

ONE BASE beyond the last legally acquired base, IF in the UMPIRE'S JUDGMENT the runner was attempting to advance at the time the ball becomes lodged in an offensive player's uniform or equipment. If the lodged ball occurs during play when the batter-runner was attempting to reach first base, the batter-runner will be awarded first base. Preceding runners will be awarded bases needed to complete the award. [Rule 8-3-3f]

TWO BASES if a FAIR BATTED BALL or thrown ball becomes DEAD because…it became lodged in a defensive player's or umpire's equipment or uniform…or lodges in a fence and it is not thrown by a pitcher from his plate…or a live thrown ball is touched by detached player equipment which is thrown, kicked, tossed or held by a fielder. [Rule 8-3-3c1]

Let's end it here, as you will have to invite me back next year, as Paul Harvey would say, TO HEAR THE REST OF THE STORY.

Not covered:
A batter-runner is OUT when…
Appeal plays [8-2-all]
Two and three base awards
Two players occupy the same base [8-2-8]